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ROSENTHAL TRIAL  
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ATLANTA

Prosecutors charged Monday that a federal prison escapee masterminded a vast cocaine operation while living as a fugitive in Colombia, and tried to arrange the killings of the U.S. and Colombian agents who broke up the ring.

Harold Rosenthal, 53, is on trial with 18 others in federal court on charges stemming from an operation that allegedly smuggled 5 tons of cocaine worth an estimated \$3.8 billion into the United States over a three-year period.

Rosenthal was arrested last September in Bogota, Colombia, by Colombian police and U.S. agents. He was a fugitive from a federal prison in Memphis, Tenn., where he escaped in September 1981 while serving a sentence on a drug conviction.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Craig Gillen said in his opening arguments that the prosecution will produce evidence of conversations in which Rosenthal, after being expelled from Colombia, directed the assassination of Colombia's assistant minister of justice.

The minister, Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, was killed April 30.

Gillen also said Rosenthal wrote letters from the federal prison in Atlanta saying: "Tell No. 1 to get the motorcycles to shoot some agents there \_ U.S. and Colombians." He did not identify "No. 1."

U.S. Attorney Larry Thompson added: "Rosenthal directed that U.S. law enforcement and Colombian law enforcement agents be killed in retaliation" for his arrest and to dissuade authorities from arresting other members of his organization. No agents were killed.

Gillen said the government also will show that, while being held in Miami after his arrest last fall, Rosenthal tried to set up another escape. He said it was foiled because Rosenthal made the arrangements with an undercover Drug Enforcement Administration agent and was transferred to Atlanta "on the day he was to have been liberated."

Prosecutors said they also will produce letters written by Rosenthal from the federal prison at Atlanta in which he discusses a proposed commando raid to free him from the facility.

Tight security was set up for the trial with metal detectors at the entrance to the courthouse and the court room.

Rosenthal has contended he had government permission to smuggle drugs as a cover for his work as a CIA agent in Colombia.

The defense contends the CIA engineered Rosenthal's escape from the Memphis prison and then gave him clearance to deal cocaine in exchange for information on ties between Colombian Marxist terrorist groups and the Soviet Union.

Rosenthal's attorney did not make an opening statement, but reserved the right to do so after the government has completed its case.

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An attorney for co-defendant Philip Bonadonna said in his opening arguments that Rosenthal was working for U.S. intelligence, and urged the jurors to acquit both Rosenthal and Bonadonna.

Attorney Steve Sadow said intelligence officers recruited Rosenthal to provide information on revolutionary groups in Colombia. He said the DEA was not told of the intelligence community's stake in the operation.